



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

June 28, 2005

Mr. Jeffrey J. Horner  
Bracewell & Guiliani, LLP  
711 Louisiana Street, Suite 2300  
Houston, Texas 77002-2770

OR2005-05714

Dear Mr. Horner:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 230025.

The Burkeville Independent School District (the "district"), which you represent, received a request for information regarding a specific incident. You claim that the submitted videotape is excepted from disclosure under section 552.114 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.<sup>1</sup> We have also considered comments submitted by the requestor. *See* Gov't Code § 552.304 (interested party may submit comments stating why information should or should not be released).

Section 552.114 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure student records at an educational institution funded completely or in part by state revenue. This office generally applies the same analysis under section 552.114 and The Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 ("FERPA"), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g, which is encompassed by section 552.101 of the Government Code.<sup>2</sup> Open Records Decision No. 539 (1990). FERPA provides that no federal funds will be made available under any applicable program to an

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<sup>1</sup> To the extent any additional responsive information existed on the date the district received this request, we assume the district has released it. If the district has not released any such records, the district must do so at this time. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.301(a), .302; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 664 (2000) (if governmental body concludes that no exceptions apply to requested information, it must release information as soon as possible).

<sup>2</sup>Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision" and encompasses information that another statute makes confidential.

educational agency or institution that releases personally identifiable information (other than directory information) contained in a student's education records to anyone but certain enumerated federal, state, and local officials and institutions, unless otherwise authorized by the student's parent. *See* 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1); *see also* 34 C.F.R. § 99.3 (defining personally identifiable information). "Education records" means those records that contain information directly related to a student and are maintained by an educational agency or institution or by a person acting for such agency or institution. *See* 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(a)(4)(A). Section 552.026 of the Government Code provides that "information contained in education records of an educational agency or institution" may only be released under the Act in accordance with FERPA. Information must be withheld from required public disclosure under FERPA only to the extent "reasonable and necessary to avoid personally identifying a particular student." *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 332 (1982), 206 (1978). Such information includes information that directly identifies a student as well as information that, if released, would allow the student's identity to be easily traced. *See* Open Records Decision No. 224 (1979) (finding student's handwritten comments protected under FERPA because they make identity of student easily traceable through handwriting, style of expression, or particular incidents related).

In Open Records Decision No. 634 (1995), this office concluded that (1) an educational agency or institution may withhold from public disclosure information that is protected by FERPA and excepted from required public disclosure by sections 552.026 and 552.101 without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision as to those exceptions, and (2) an educational agency or institution that is state-funded may withhold from public disclosure information that is excepted from required public disclosure by section 552.114 as a "student record," insofar as the "student record" is protected by FERPA, without the necessity of requesting an attorney general decision as to that exception. However, because you have submitted the videotape to this office for a decision, we have reviewed it and agree that it is protected under section 552.114 and FERPA.

The requestor in this instance does not appear to be among the individuals or entities authorized by section 1232g(b) to receive this information. *See* 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1) (listing individuals and entities to whom release of education records is authorized). Furthermore, you also have not informed us that the requestor has provided the district with written authorization from any of the students' parents or legal guardians in compliance with section 1232g(b)(2). *See* 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(2) (prescribing elements of proper written authorization by student's parent or legal guardian). We therefore conclude that the district must withhold the submitted videotape in its entirety pursuant to section 552.114 and FERPA.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited

from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

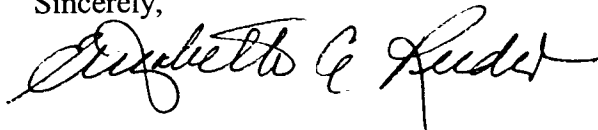
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth C. Reeder", written in a cursive style.

Elizabeth C. Reeder  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

ECR/sdk

Ref: ID# 230025

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Theme S. Linh  
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(w/out enclosures)